

About this Guidance

This guidance document is intended to help professionals complete the inter-agency referral form when they have decided to make a referral to children's social care services (Essex County Council's Children and Young People's Service). The document provides explanations of the information that should be provided on the referral form and where and how the completed form should be sent.

CAF and referrals for children's social care services

In reaching a decision to refer a child or young person to children's social care, the referring professional is expected to have reached a considered judgement about the level of risk, need or vulnerability of the child or young person. Work in progress (December 2005), sponsored by the Essex CYPSP on a common language between service agencies should assist such judgements to be made more consistently.

From April 2006 onwards it is expected that the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) will also help to provide this consistency. CAF should be used by professionals with children and young people who have additional needs to enable a broad view to be formed about these needs and assist with judgements about what if any additional help may be needed.

When CAF is implemented in practice referrals to children's social care services should only be undertaken by another professional following a process where a CAF has already been completed – except in urgent and immediate child protection situations where it would be unrealistic and unsafe to expect another professional to first complete the CAF.

The referral form asks whether a CAF has been completed and, if so, asks that it is attached. This will not be relevant (i.e. a referring professional does not need to undertake a CAF) before CAF is implemented. Advanced notice will be provided to all front line professionals of the implementation timescale and associated training.

Referring agencies often have a great deal of information and assessment material regarding children and young people known to them. It is important that all relevant information is shared when referrals are made to Children's Social Care (Social Services) teams. Fuller information may enable speedier decisions, swifter action and prevent duplication in information gathering. For this reason the inter-agency referral form should be completed *as far as possible* in full.

Prior to a referral

Before making a social services referral every effort should have been made to work with the child or young person from your own organisation or professional practice base involving other professionals as necessary.

You will normally have undertaken your own assessment and be clear about the child's needs and the outcomes expected from the referral. The consent of the parents/carers (or the young person's consent if competent to give this) must always be sought except where a child or young person is considered to be at risk of abuse (significant harm). Guidance on information sharing and consent is separately available and can be downloaded from the ISA page of the Essex CYPSP website (www.essexcypsp.org).

Nothing in this guidance is intended to conflict with existing child protection guidelines. Available in the Blue Book for professionals these guidelines should be followed if there is concern about a child being at risk of abuse.

If you are in doubt about whether or not to make a referral, consultation should be sought in the first instance from your own manager.

How to make a referral

Urgent referrals

If you know a social worker is already involved with the child or family contact them immediately – in their absence ask to speak with their manager.

If you are not aware of any existing social work involvement make an immediate telephone referral using the social care emergency line for professionals: **0845 606 1212**. This is a direct line for professionals only and is also used out of hours for our emergency duty service. An alternative urgent telephone line is also available to report concerns about children or young people who may be being abused- this is: **0845 603 7634**. Please note this line is open to all callers (i.e. the public and professionals).

The 0845 606 1212 number must only be used by professionals and only where there is an immediate concern about the risk of abuse to a child. Otherwise the normal telephone numbers must be used (see below).

On calling you will be asked for details of your concern by Essex Social Care Direct Staff. They will pass these details on to the local children's social work team.

Essex Social Care Direct staff will advise you of the need to confirm your referral in writing within 48 hours and recommend you do this by completing the inter-agency referral form. They will also give you a reference to insert on the form which will help match the form with details you provided on the telephone.

When you complete the inter-agency referral form you should clearly indicate in the space available that the completed form is confirmation in writing of the telephone referral you have already made.

Non urgent referrals

You should normally make non-urgent referrals in writing using the inter-agency referral form.

Where you do so, in the space provided on the form you should indicate that you are completing the referral form to make a new referral (as opposed to confirming a referral already made by telephone).

Non-urgent referrals may also be made by telephone using the normal social care telephone number (**0845 603 7627**) and speaking with Social Care Direct. You will still need to confirm your referral in writing using the inter-agency referral form.

Emergencies out of normal working hours

Where there are concerns about the immediate welfare or safety of a child/young person the Emergency Duty Service should be contacted via **0845 606 1212**

Completing the inter-agency referral form

Although this will not always be possible, it will help us if the form is type- rather than hand-written.

Section 1 – Basic details – fill in what you know as fully as possible. If you do not know an item of information please indicate “not known”. It’s important that you indicate in this section whether you are making a non-urgent referral using the form or sending the form to confirm in writing an existing telephone referral.

Section 2 – Basis for referral – please provide clear reasons for making the referral to children’s social care. Its important that you let us know whether the parent, carer, child or young person(s) concerned are aware of the referral and whether their consent has been obtained to the referral and the information you have provided. Where you may be making the referral without this awareness and/or consent this section allows you to explain the circumstances that justify it.

Section 3 – Referrer details - In completing this section please provide your own details as fully as possible, including an email address if you would prefer communication to be by email (please note that we encourage confidential information to be communicated by email providing this can be done by a password protected attachment). We ask for information about any known “safety” issues in order to help our risk assessment for front line staff.

Sections 4 and 5 are for completion by ECC staff only and (Section 5) should provide for feedback to you about the referral.

The information you provide under Sections 1 and 2 will provide a good foundation for decision making about whether to complete an assessment, and/or provide services.

How to send the completed inter-agency referral form to children's social care

A number of methods are available.

Sending the form by fax

Please fax the completed form to 0845 601 6230 (urgent and non urgent referrals). The emergency duty fax line is 01245 434700

Sending the form by email

Please email the form as a password protected email attachment to socialcaredirect@essexcc.gov.uk. Essex Social Care Direct can advise you (by telephone or by email) what the current password is.

Sending the form by post

Please send the form under confidential cover by first class mail to:

Essex Social Care Direct,
Essex House,
200 The Crescent,
Colchester
CO4 9YQ

Where to obtain a copy of the inter-agency referral form

The referral form can be downloaded from the Essex County Council website. You can locate a copy on the website by the following path:

1. Click on the health and caring menu on the main home page
2. Click on the Children and Young People's Service menu item. This will take you to the Children and Young People's Service Homepage.
3. At this Home page click on *assessing needs* (first item in the menu on the left hand side of the page). This takes you to the Assessing Needs page.
4. You will see the inter-agency referral form icon on the right hand side of this page.

Double clicking on this icon will open the document.

You can then either:

- print the form off and complete it by hand (enabling you to post it send it to the address above) OR
- save the document and complete it electronically enabling you to either email it (as described above) or print and fax it (also described above).

Copies of the inter-agency referral form may also be obtained from your agency representative on the Essex Child Protection Committee.